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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the importance of knowledge about the social organization of schools and classrooms for beginning teachers. The paper begins with a consideration of schools and classrooms as cultural settings and examines the beginning teacher's role within them. The remaining sections of the paper examine the interweaving of school social life with the fundamental teaching concerns of planning, instruction, and equity. This examination focuses on three images coined by educational researchers to capture key aspects of the teacher's role in school and classroom culture and their hiddeness to members of that culture. The "hidden world" of teacher thought and planning, the normative or "hidden curriculum" of schools, and the "invisible culture" of communication style related to language and ethnic identity are described. These hidden dimensions of teaching, rarely available to the pupil or novice teacher by means of observation or participation, must become the subject of critical examination and reflection if the novice teacher is to make a successful transition from "pupil" to "teacher" in the familiar culture of the classroom. The study of the social organization of schools and classrooms is therefore important to beginners in its own right and as a means to the end of becoming a thoughtful professional able to consider alternatives and possibilities as well as realities of classrooms. (Author)

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# Social Organization of Classes and Schools

Susan Florio-Ruane

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# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CLASSES AND SCHOOLS

Susan Florio-Ruane

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the importance of knowledge about the social organization of schools and classrooms for beginning teachers. The paper begins with a consideration of schools and classrooms as cultural settings and examines the beginning teacher's role within them. The remaining sections of the paper examine the interweaving of school social life with the fundamental teaching concerns of planning, instruction, and equity. This examination focuses on three images coined by educational researchers to capture key aspects of the teacher's role in school and classroom culture and their hiddenness to members of that culture. The "hidden world" of teacher thought and planning, the normative or "hidden curriculum" of schools, and the "invisible culture" of communication style related to language and ethnic identity are described. These hidden dimensions of teaching, rarely available to the pupil or novice teacher by means of observation or participation, must become the subject of critical examination and reflection if the novice teacher is to make a successful transition from "pupil" to "teacher" in the familiar culture of the classroom. The study of the social organization of schools and classrooms is therefore important to beginners in its own right and as a means to the end of becoming a thoughtful professional able to consider alternatives and possibilities as well as realities of classrooms.

# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CLASSES AND SCHOOLS[1]

Susan Florio-Ruane[2]

Teacher educators have many things to teach beginners. Novice teachers urgently feel the need to learn about academic subject matter, instructional materials and techniques, classroom management, and child growth and development. Yet an important topic is often not taught but is assumed to be part of the "background knowledge" which novice teachers bring to their professional preparation in virtue of their extensive apprenticeship of observation. That topic is the social organization of schools and classrooms. This paper describes why the topic is so easily treated as background knowledge by beginning teachers and argues that teachers must learn to unearth, examine, and consider alternatives to the norms that organize status quo teaching if they are to become innovative and thoughtful professionals.

Knowledge about the social organization of schools and classrooms is an important topic for beginning teachers for several reasons. First, there has been a great deal of research about the social organization of teaching and learning in school in the past two decades. It is a challenging and long-overdue exercise to review that research and identify essential knowledge for beginning teachers. Second, the social organization of schools and classrooms is a topic which, on its face, may not seem particularly new or essential to novices. Having spent most of their lives learning how to go to school, prospective teachers are already experienced with the social norms of schooling in our society. However, as they assume responsibility to provide for educational life and learning in their own classrooms, beginning teachers must examine and transform many tacitly held assumptions about the nature of schooling--its norms, activities, and social roles. The challenge for teacher educators is to use knowledge about the social organization of schooling to help beginning teachers come to understand classrooms in a new light.

To show the relationship between selected knowledge about social life and learning in school and the needs and concerns of the beginning teacher, this paper begins with a consideration of schools and classrooms as cultural settings and examines the beginning teacher's role within them. The remaining sections of the paper examine the interweaving of school social life with fundamental teaching concerns of planning, instruction and equity. This paper concludes with an annotated bibliography of further reading on the subject of the social organizations of classrooms and schools (see appendix).

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[1]A version of this paper appears as a chapter in M. Reynolds (Ed.), *Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher* (1989). London: Pergamon, and was presented at the March 1989 meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco.

[2]Susan Florio-Ruane is an associate professor of teacher education at Michigan State University.

**Schools and Classrooms as Cultural Settings**

Schools and classrooms are complex cultural settings. It is worthwhile for the beginning teacher to understand them as such because learning is an intellectual process that is socially mediated. This means that learning depends greatly on communication. Our social environments and expressive behaviors provide powerful contexts for the teaching and learning we undertake. Moreover, the social contexts we create and inhabit are not simply the background against which life is played. They are both shaped by and the shapers of our language and learning. Since education depends on communication--between teacher and student, among students, and in the medium of text--understanding and helping to shape the social contexts for classroom communication are significant responsibilities of the teacher.

Culture is commonly thought of as the customs, practices, and traditions of a social group. While these are all part of culture, in a more general sense, according to Spradley and McCurdy (1972), culture is "the knowledge people use to generate and interpret behavior" (p. 8). In short, culture can be thought of as knowledge of shared rules (Goodenough, 1965). That knowledge regulates our communication and underlies our social practices in schools and elsewhere. We shall see that qualifying our definition of culture to incorporate normative knowledge about communication helps us to understand the links between school and classroom social organization and learning. Our definition of culture also illuminates some of the particular challenges facing the beginning teacher.

Cultural knowledge includes propositions, procedures, beliefs, values, and history. Rarely taught directly, this knowledge is largely acquired by members' participation in the activities comprising everyday life within a social group. The group holds cultural knowledge "in common with others and in common with others to be taken for granted" (Garfinkel, as paraphrased in Cook-Gumperz, 1975, p. 138). Thus, while cultural knowledge is socially constructed, can differ from group to group, and can change within a group; its shared and tacit nature makes it seem absolute. It is difficult for members of a culture to contemplate shared principles of social action or to consider how the norms that serve to organize their lives might be constituted differently.

Using the concept of culture to study the problem of educational change within the school, Sarason (1971) noted that tacitly held cultural norms and practices make everyday life sensible and meaningful. Thus, the idea that practice might be organized in ways different from the status quo is, in Sarason's words,

> a nearly impossible one for most people because it confronts them with the necessity of changing their thinking, then changing their actions, and finally changing the overall structure of the setting. (p. 13)

Sarason's statement underscores the idea that the cultural knowledge that organizes schooling resides deeply in thought, action, and social structure. These essential parts of school and classroom culture are initially taken for granted by beginning teachers who have spent many years as pupils. To become a professional teacher requires reexamination and transformation of what is already known. It is necessary to know, assess, and change one's tacit knowledge about schooling if one is to make reasoned pedagogical choices in creating a classroom community.

When the novice teacher, like the anthropologist in an alien culture, asks the disarming question, "What's going on here?" she disrupts the organization and its routines. In asking that question (and to the extent that she also is armed with her own ideas about what should be going on) the beginning teacher may well be going against the grain. Yet her education professors have charged her with the countercultural assignment of questioning routine school behavior and considering alternatives to it. Thus the beginner can feel lonely, frustrated, disheartened--even guilty. For this reason, the novice should be taught and encouraged by classroom teachers and university professors who are at ease studying and questioning their own practice and the norms that organize teaching and learning in their own classrooms. They need to create workplaces--or school cultures--for and with beginning teachers in which critical examination of routine practice is both a highly valued and visible norm (Ann Lieberman, personal communication, July 1988).

**Cultural Knowledge and Learning to Teach**

Unlike novice physicians or lawyers whose entry into professional roles is accompanied by a vastly new social organization, technical language, and round of activities beginning teachers are asked to assume their new professional role in a setting so familiar that the special nature of the teacher's work may initially be obscured from their view or attention. As longstanding pupils, they have learned how to behave appropriately and become, in Hymes's (1974) words, "socially competent." Like members of other cultures, they hold a stock of tacit knowledge that helps them sensibly take part in everyday classroom situations. When prospective teachers enter their professional training, they draw heavily on this stock of knowledge for their initial images of the teacher's role, the nature of learners, the curriculum, and the organization of classroom activity.

Since they already know a great deal about the ways and means of schooling, some of beginning teachers' initial work is simplified. In fact, teacher educators expect beginners to share some very basic assumptions about the nature and purposes of school--"who we are" and "what we are doing"--without much initial orientation. Moreover, as Lortie (1975) found, early and extended experience of schools is a powerful force in the recruitment of teachers. However, despite apparent these advantages, beginning teachers' familiarity with the culture of classrooms and schools ultimately complicates their learning and work. Like

anthropologists studying their own culture, they are apt to miss the underlying cultural knowledge organizing practice because it has become so familiar to them that it is, in fact, invisible.

Thus beginners tend to focus on the procedures experienced teachers follow to create smoothly running classrooms, rather than the judgment and decision making used to plan meaningful social contexts for learning (Clark and Yinger, 1980). This focus on what is visible leaves out important elements--the social norms that provide a context for teaching and learning; the teacher's intellectual work in planning, teaching, and assessing within the social context; and the subtle negotiations within which teacher and students enact and reenact their relationships to one another and to academic content. Three important ways a beginning teacher's knowledge and practice can be limited by taking the social order of schooling for granted are described below.

**Accepting School Norms as "Given"**

Interviewing student teachers about their early field experiences, Tabachnick, Popkewitz, and Zeichner (1979-1980) found that preservice teachers spoke of time constraints and institutional norms in classrooms as "givens." Rarely in their descriptions of their own student teaching did beginners communicate to the researchers a sense of wonder or curiosity about the phenomena of teaching and learning or a sense of the many possibilities for organizing instruction or structuring the learning environment. The researchers also found that the university classes designed to afford opportunities for critical reflection upon the field experience seemed to be under the spell of the institutional norms that regulate life in classrooms. Thus they concluded that

> contrary to popular belief, the university and the schools were not in competition with each other for the hearts and minds of students; instead they collaborated closely with one another to create a powerful conservative force for defending existing institutional arrangements from close scrutiny and challenge. (p. 22)

While these scholars offer a social structural explanation for the inherently conservative nature of early field experiences, one can easily see that the beginning teacher's inclination to accept school norms as givens, as conditions that are immutable rather than as changing or changeable, is due in large part to acculturation. Because they organize everyday life in shared and unstated ways, norms have the force of truth or absoluteness. Learning to be a teacher in part involves seeing the educational process as a social construction. Once seen that way, a teacher may envision alternative ways schooling might be organized both inside classrooms and in relation to their pupils' communities and families.

**Overlooking the Hidden World of Teaching**

A second complication arising from familiarity with the classroom relates to the beginning teacher's assumption of a new social position, or "status," with attendant rights and obligations, or "role" in a familiar cultural setting. Status and role are sociological constructs that capture simultaneously what is institutionally fixed in a setting and what is negotiated or worked out by participants as they meet face-to-face (Goodenough, 1965). The socially competent participant knows about the preexisting social order and can improvise within that order to recreate or change it. This knowledge enables social life in school to be both routinized and improvised on a daily basis (Erickson, 1982).

While beginning teachers have had considerable experience with the order of classroom life, they have learned this order as pupils. This point of view is limited because it overlooks much of the thought and planning that underlies teacher action and lacks an awareness of the institutional forces that shape or constrain that action. The institutional policies and teacher decisions that frame, focus, and sequence the learning activities comprising a curriculum have to this point been obscure. Pupils are generally not aware of teacher thinking related to instruction, individual needs, and assessment of learning. Sometimes this thinking takes place in the empty classroom. More often, however, it occurs in the midst of the teaching act itself.

Teacher thinking is a dimension of school cultural knowledge that remains unspoken by most teachers when they are working directly with children. When a pupil becomes a teacher, this knowledge must be articulated and otherwise made evident so that the novice can fruitfully observe experienced teachers and begin to assume the professional's rights and duties. Teachers think about many things as they teach. However, it is in the act of planning--both in the empty classroom and in the midst of instruction--that teachers' thoughts about the curriculum, pupils, and the school's social order converge. Jackson (1966) and later Clark and Yinger (1980) called planning the "hidden world" of teaching.

Planning is "hidden" in the sense that it is part of the teacher's mental life rather than a directly observable behavior. Moreover, since it is part of the routine normative knowledge that organizes teaching practice, teachers tend not to discuss planning but rather take it for granted as part of their day to day activities. In addition, teacher thinking may be hidden to the extent that educational research, teacher preparation, or educational polices and programs stress teaching performance over design. Of this Clark and Yinger (1980) observe that

> the situations teachers face in schools today often put more weight on the role of the teacher as technician and manager rather than on the more pedagogical role of designer and professional. The design/professional aspects of a teacher's role are often hidden. Teacher planning is in reality the "hidden world of teaching." (p. 14)

Finally, planning may be hidden from the beginner when the "survival" concerns of making it through the school day supplant thinking about curriculum and instructional design. Beginning teachers often write detailed lesson plans which they use as scripts, inventories, or procedural guides. These initial plans, however, bear little resemblance to the intellectual work of curriculum and instructional design undertaken by experienced teachers.

Teacher educators need to support the beginner during the gradual transformation of planning from the writing of lesson scripts or skill inventories to the design of curriculum and instructional strategies. Like newcomers to any complex cognitive activity, novice teachers gradually internalize both the behavioral routines and the higher order thinking that constitute teaching. As beginners navigate the complexities of classroom life, they commit to memory or routine many of the procedural aspects of classroom survival which previously dominated their attention. Freed somewhat from these concerns, they can begin the planning process in earnest. Planning can be greatly supported by experienced teachers who are willing and able to think aloud about their own planning. In addition, planning is nurtured in conversations where experienced teachers engage beginners as trusted colleagues with whom to discuss plans, miscalculations, regrets, and revisions.

**Assuming Teacher Authority and Making Instructional Decisions**

A third sense in which the cultural nature of the school setting must be investigated by the beginning teacher also stems from the limited point of view which beginners bring to teaching. Pupils know their teacher as both "in authority" and "an authority"--the arbiter of both the social routines of classroom and the academic content discussed within them (Buchmann, 1984). It is well documented that teachers hold great authority to control social and academic matters in the classroom. Of this reality Jackson (1968) wrote

> School is . . . a place in which the division between the weak and the powerful is clearly drawn. This may sound like a harsh way to describe the separation between teachers and students, but it serves to emphasize a fact that is often overlooked, or touched upon gingerly at best. Teachers are indeed more powerful than students, in the sense of having greater responsibility for giving shape to classroom events, and this sharp difference in authority is another feature of school life with which students must learn to deal. (p. 10)

Jackson, in his account of the power differences between teacher and students, notes that "responsibility" accompanies teacher power. Teachers are held accountable for their educational decisions by colleagues, administrators, families, politicians, and others. Thus teachers' authority is tempered by their responsibilities as well as by the procedures and resources of the public institutions in which they work. However, since the forces that constrain teacher decision making and action are part of schooling's norms, they tend to be

invisible to pupils. From a pupil's point of view, therefore, it is not uncommon for teacher authority to appear to be considerably more broad and sweeping than is actually the case. Thus novices who bring views of teacher authority acquired as pupils to their first teaching experiences may be exceedingly concerned with social and academic control. Like other beginners, they are apt at the outset to define in bold strokes the behaviors attendant to their new role. Goffman (1961) calls this phenomenon "embracement" of a role. He suggests that "to embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation, to be fully seen in terms of the image, and to confirm expressively one's acceptance of it" (p. 106).

Beginning teachers may initially embrace the teacher role with its putative rights and duties to control both academic and social information in the classroom, and the school culture is apt to support this definition of role and situation. Waller's (1932) pioneering sociological work on the school's culture demonstrated that the school is, indeed, deeply concerned with matters of authority. Moreover, Waller showed that the school's norms stressed the institutionalized leadership of the teacher and the subordination of pupils. In this culture what was called "management" was, in fact, "getting the teacher's definition of the situation accepted by the students" (p. 203). Countless similar studies of school and classroom have echoed Waller over the years.

Significant here for the beginning teacher is the realization that a social context awaits in the classroom where he or she will comfortably (or uncomfortably) assume social and intellectual authority over children. But, as Waller's work asserts, there is an essential mismatch between such a social arrangement and teacher's work--the education of children. Learners who are subordinates cannot participate in many of the activities and forms of discourse that would lead to genuine education. Thus beginning teachers need to learn to temper their tremendous authority not only because they like children and want to be liked in return, but because they want to teach well. According to Cohen (in press), Waller, like many progressives of his era--and perhaps like many young people initially drawn to a career in teaching, "was a fan of learning from experience, of education for understanding, of freedom for students within schools, of spontaneity, discovery, and joy in learning" (p. 6).

These ways of thinking about teaching are often not supported by the culture of schools and classrooms. Therefore, beginning teachers need to be helped and challenged to create classroom communities in which the teacher's authority is sufficiently mitigated for students to learn freely--perhaps even joyously. This transformation occurs in such learning situations as (a) discussions which encourage student questioning and problem solving, (b) peer tutoring, (c) cooperative learning, (d) writing conferences, and many others (Brophy, in press). These instructional forms increase uncertainty for teacher and pupil alike. But they also increase spontaneity in learning and freedom for teacher and pupils to explore and question. In this kind of teaching, having acquired a sense of both the normative structure

of schooling and one's options to improvise within it, teachers engage in what Goffman (1961) calls "role distance," or the "pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role" (p. 108). Here teacher judgment breaks away from the behavioral routines of the classroom. Teacher and students experience redefinition of their rights and obligations vis-a-vis one another and their academic work.

Given that school activities occur largely in the medium of language, beginning teachers should come gradually to learn not only that their role is constrained by social policies and accountability to the many stakeholders in the educational process but that learning is socially mediated. Teachers do not control what is learned. Rather, learning is negotiated or socially constructed by teachers and pupils as they communicate within broader contexts of education. Douglas Barnes (1976) argues that in working out a lived curriculum, "teacher and pupils join in setting up the social context or communication system, and it is this which will shape the range of language strategies used by pupils as they grapple with learning tasks" (p. 33).

### Learning a New Role in a Familiar Setting

The beginning teacher must try to assume a new--but familiar--role in a familiar setting. To do this, he or she needs to "make the familiar strange" and expose and question assumptions about what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess learning (Erickson, Florio, and Buschman, 1980). Quoting Kluckholn's aphorism that "the fish would be the last creature to discover water," Erickson (1986) asserts that the student of educational practice (whether beginning teacher, educational researcher, or reflective practitioner) must start with the basic question, "What is happening here?" The question, he argues,

> is not trivial since everyday life is largely invisible to us (because of its familiarity and because of its contradictions, which people may not want to face). We do not realize the pattern in our actions as we perform them. (p. 121)

By studying the commonplace, what is happening between teachers and learners becomes visible and can be documented, analyzed, and evaluated. To begin the critical study of practice, the novice teacher might attempt to bracket her prior knowledge of school and classroom settings, activities, rules, and roles and ask the following sorts of questions about them:

1. What is happening, specifically, in social action that takes place in this particular setting?

2. What do these actions mean to the actors involved in them, at the moment the actions took place?

3. How are the happenings organized in patterns of social organization and learned cultural principles for the conduct of everyday life--how, in other words, are people in the immediate setting consistently present to each other as environments for one another's meaningful actions?

4. How is what is happening in this setting as a whole (i.e., the classroom) related to happenings at other system levels outside and inside the setting (e.g., the school building, a child's family, the school system, federal government mandates regarding mainstreaming)?

5. How do the ways everyday life in this setting is organized compare with other ways of organizing social life in a wide range of settings in other places and at other times? (Erickson, Florio, and Buschman, cited in Erickson, 1986, p. 121)

Assuming a new status and role in a familiar cultural setting, then, requires both new knowledge and reflection on what is already known. Among the beginning teacher's new rights and duties are the observation of and participation in children's learning. Teachers not only plan activities and assess behaviors but they orchestrate a complex ensemble performance in which teacher and learners communicate for the purpose of social and intellectual growth. Teachers hold the authority to shape the social conditions of the classroom. Since those conditions help to shape what children learn about in school, teachers need to be critical of existing school practices, thoughtful in their planning, and articulate about their reasons for teaching as they do.

**The School and Classroom as Communities and in Communities**

Because most beginning teachers will work in public institutions, they are confronted at the outset with the responsibility to create an effective learning community that incorporates pupils of diverse social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. They also will find that external policies regulate and limit their resources and degrees of professional freedom. While schools and classrooms themselves are cultural settings, they are imbued with the history, norms, and values of the wider society. We know that in a pluralistic society such as our own we have not one uniform culture, but an amalgam of cultural groups. Schools are influenced by that cultural diversity and therefore share in the wider society's contradictions, injustices, and hopes related to the education of all children. One responsibility facing teachers from the outset is that they offer all children in their charge opportunities to learn. Schools are places looked to by the wider society to help solve existing social problems. In a society beset with problems of inequality, school is seen as a site where people can learn equally and increase their chances of success in life.

Schools have particular functions relating to the education of the young. They are delegated a set of purposes and activities that may not be undertaken elsewhere in the

child's experience. These purposes may change somewhat with time, may seem contradictory, and may be unevenly realized. Goodlad (1984) finds in his survey research and historical review, for example, that our society's expectations of school and classroom have remained high and relatively stable during our century. Since the rise of the common schools, the special functions of schooling valued by Americans are the following:

- Academic, embracing all intellectual skills and domains;
- Vocational, geared to developing readiness for productive work and economic responsibility;
- Social and civic, related to preparing for socialization into a complex society; and
- Personal, emphasizing the development of individual responsibility, talent, and free expression. (p. 37)

One can see at a glance that these hopes and expectations for schooling are not only sweeping, but they may at times be in conflict with one another and with the prevailing beliefs of the society at large. Nevertheless, the teacher is expected to teach toward them all.

For better or worse, teachers work in the context of the wider society. Its goals for schools, its social problems, and the kind and number of resources it provides are powerful contexts for teacher thought and action. Beginning teachers need to be aware of the social, cultural, and historical constraints on their work. They must recognize the tension between the often contradictory demands placed on schools and their professional obligation to teach toward the personal and social good of all pupils.

Acknowledging their links to the wider society, schools and classrooms are also small societies with cultures of their own. A stable group of participants meets routinely within them. The participants take in a limited range of activities in which their roles, or rights and duties toward one another, are relatively predictable. Schools and classrooms then have familiar participants, activities, histories, and traditions. It is the possibility for the classroom to be a cultural setting with its own integrity which offers the teacher perhaps her greatest challenge and opportunity--to teach all learners.

### Communication, Learning, and the Social Organization of the Classroom

Of the numerous factors influencing student learning and school achievement, many are outside the direct control of teachers or pupils. Teachers, however, do have direct influence on the social contexts of instruction in their classrooms. Teachers and students communicate with one another within the temporal, spatial, normative, and material boundaries of the classroom. How they organize that communication greatly determines the learning which takes place in school. Teachers work with students to create a classroom

communication system which primarily consists of language. According to Douglas Barnes (1976),

> the major means by which children in our schools formulate knowledge and relate it to their own purposes and view of the world are speech and writing. The importance of language--and other symbolic systems such as mathematics--is that it makes knowledge and thought processes readily available to introspection and revision. If we know what we know, then we can change it. Language is not the same as thought, but it allows us to reflect upon our thoughts. Not only is talking and writing a major means by which people learn, but what they learn can often hardly be distinguished from the ability to communicate it. Learning to communicate is the heart of education. (pp. 19-20)

A contextual view of teaching and learning starts from the premise that students do not have a limited set of academic abilities independent of social context. Instead, they learn and practice an array of knowledge and skills by participating in meaningful activities. Thus achievement is linked to the ways that teacher and students create meaning together. Given particular contextual constraints, any individual can be a low--or high--achiever (Christopher Wheeler, personal communication, March 1988). Despite this reality, extensive research on the social organization of classroom discourse has found that students experience differential treatment and access to knowledge in school as a function of their social class, ethnic or racial identity, and mother tongue (see Jacob and Jordan, 1987). This research finds that the norms or rules organizing classroom participation and subject matter learning are not uniformly shared among the diverse members of the school community. Teachers have both the responsibility and the opportunity to create with pupils classroom settings in which participation of all students is maximized and response to differences among learners enables rather than limits individuals' knowledge and growth.

### The Hidden Curriculum and the Invisible Culture

Perhaps the most interesting and significant research on the social organization of schools and classroom has been conducted in the interest of educational equity and the improvement of instruction (summarized in Erickson, 1986; Cazden, 1986). We have learned from research on school and classroom social norms that everyday life in those settings is less than salutary. Jackson (1968) typified classroom life as impersonal and competitive, where students likely learn more about "crowds, praise, and power" than about academics (p. 10). Jackson labeled this aspect of schooling the "hidden curriculum," and contrasted it with the official or academic curriculum. He stressed that while it was unstated, the hidden curriculum was clearly taught and learned in school, and was, in fact, a systematic and

powerful way to teach students about themselves, their place in the world, and what learning might be like:

> The crowds, praise, and power that combine to give a distinctive flavor to classroom life collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school. The demands created by these features of classroom life may be contrasted with the academic demands--the "official" curriculum, so to speak--to which educators traditionally have paid the most attention. As might be expected, the two curriculums are related to each other in several important ways. (p. 34)

Like Jackson, Dreeben (1967) presents a portrait of classrooms as impersonal and harsh. For him, classrooms are places in which children must learn (a) to be independent, (b) to accept treatment as a member of a class rather than as a unique person, and (c) to compete with one another. Finally, Goodlad's (1984) research tends not only to agree with these descriptions, but stresses the passivity of pupils and the relative absence of affect among teachers and learners. He finds a tendency for teachers to dominate classroom talk, students to remain silent and passive, and student work to be independently written. He finds a paucity of teacher praise, correction, or guiding response to student work, and a deadeningly narrow range of classroom activities.

Running through all of these descriptions is a concern for the humanity of learners. These critical studies of schooling's status quo raise important questions regarding the quality of experience for all children. They force critical examination of school and classroom norms and routines and reveal the contradictions of institutionalized and mandatory public education with our highest hopes and goals for children's learning. Sociolinguists have attempted to relate the aforementioned researchers' assertions about classroom life to the very fabric of that life--the discourse of teachers and pupils. By analysis of classroom talk--its organization and patterns of participation--researchers find that the classroom's hidden curriculum or normative nature is intimately entwined with academic learning. To illustrate, consider the following extended example from Douglas Barnes's (1976) research on classroom discourse:

> Let us take as an example a range of different ways of teaching the "same" content, perhaps the way of life of urban working people at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One teacher may talk to a class about this, and then ask questions to elicit some material from her pupils. Another teacher may first issue a folder of facsimiles, pictures, and other evidence from the period and then ask the pupils to build up a written account. Or, using the same folder, another may set a problem to pupils: "Were people satisfied with their way of life?" and set the children to work in small groups identifying evidence pro and contra. The teacher may ask pupils to report orally on what they have

> found, or to prepare a wall display, or to write an account purely for her eyes. When she leads discussion of what they have found out, she may guide them along a closely predetermined route, or follow ideas raised by pupils. In all of these cases, the topic remains the same; it is the communication that differs. As the form of communication changes, so will the form of what is learnt. One kind of communication will encourage the memorizing of details, another will encourage pupils to reason about the evidence, and a third will lead them towards the imaginative reconstruction of a way of life. From the communication they will also learn what is expected of them as pupils, how sharply Mrs. Jones will apply her own criteria of relevance, whether they are expected to have ideas of their own or only to remember what they have been told. That is, they will find out how far they are expected to take part in the formulating of knowledge, or whether they are to act mainly as receivers. (pp. 14-15)

As this example clearly shows, what we learn and how we learn it are closely tied to classroom social relations and patterns of communication--with teachers, peers, and textual materials.

**The Special Problems of Minority Children**

Analysts find that problems stemming from the school's hidden curriculum exacerbate the difficulties of pupils who enter school with a cultural background or first language different from that of the American middle class. If a hidden curriculum operates powerfully within classrooms, and if it is, indeed, implicit and not directly taught, researchers have wondered what consequences befall pupils whose cultural knowledge differs widely not only from the norms of schooling, but from the society's dominant social group. There appears to be consensus among researchers and practitioners that some differences are more critical than others in predicting school success. School can be a dull or uncomfortable place for some. For others it can be profoundly alienating. Students whose first language, traditions, or values differ from those assumed by our system of mass public education encounter conflicts when asked to do such apparently routine things as compete with other students for a grade or bid for a turn to speak or demonstrate one's knowledge for public evaluation (Singer, 1988). Moreover, to the extent that home culture's practices and values are not acknowledged or incorporated by the school, parents may find that they are not able to support children in their academic pursuits even when that is their fervent wish (Trueba, 1988).

Comparative studies of minority children's communication at home and at school have proliferated in the past 15 years. They typically involve extensive participant observation in both settings and close analysis of recorded speech within them. Among the numerous studies of this kind, the work of Philips (1983) has done is particularly relevant here. Philips studied what she called "participant structures," or culturally learned patterns of

conversational rights and obligations. She observed Native American children at home on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation and in the reservation school. She compared these data with observations of children in a nonreservation school nearby. Philips found important differences in the ways Indian children were expected to participate at home and in the ways their white teachers expected them to participate in school.

When Philips (1972) reviewed comparisons between Indian and non-Indian children's verbal participation under different social conditions, she found that several key features of the Warm Springs children's behavior stood out. These features were appropriate given their home socialization but seemed inappropriate to the norms of mainstream classroom interaction. Philips summarizes them as follows:

> First of all, Warm Springs Indian children show relatively less willingness to perform or participate verbally when they must speak alone in front of other students. Second, they are relatively less eager to speak when the point at which the speech occurs is dictated by the teacher, as it is during sessions when the teacher is working with the whole class or a small group. They also show considerable reluctance to be placed in the "leadership" play roles that require them to assume the same type of dictation of the acts of their peers. (p. 380)

However, Philips also found positive behaviors acquired in the family and community that greatly enabled Indian children to participate in particular types of classroom activities. Of these, Philips writes that the Indian children showed a greater willingness than their non-Indian counterparts

> to participate in group activities that do not create a distinction between individual performer and audience, and a relatively greater use of opportunities in which the point at which the student speaks or acts is determined by himself rather than by the teacher or a "leader." (p. 380)

Philips traced the school difficulties of the Warm Springs Indian children she studied to differences in their culturally based, tacit understandings of the appropriate ways to get along with peers and learn from adults. One can see at a glance that the bias in mainstream classrooms toward "crowds, praise, and power" does not offer many opportunities for Indian students to apply their strategies for learning and participation to the tasks of school. Thus it is not only the apparent mismatch between appropriate ways of learning and participation at home and at school that causes problems for these students. It is also the nature of classroom authority and relations and the lack of openness in classrooms to other ways of learning that militate against Indian children's appropriate and productive participation.

In documenting the problems of cultural discontinuity between home and school, Philips unearthed conflict between two systems of child socialization. However, as we have seen in this paper, cultural systems for communication are largely unspoken, and so, Philips

found, are the conflicts between them. Calling these dimensions of socialization the "invisible culture," Philips's study shows that cultural differences that are unspoken and misunderstood can yield pupil withdrawal and the imputation of indifference and even incompetence to minority pupils.

This work sensitizes both beginning and experienced teachers to the need not only to understand the norms regulating communication in their schools and classrooms but to the fact that these norms, as social constructions, may not mirror the social norms or values of the cultural groups to which their pupils belong. It also demonstrates that miscommunication and cultural conflict can result in school failure and alienation. This realization alone can be a significant intervention into teaching if it encourages teachers to seek greater understanding of their students. This understanding should reveal differences between the ways that learners make meaning and the meaning systems we tend to take for granted in school. In addition, awareness of the social construction of everyday classroom life and the possibility of its conflictual relationship to children's lives outside school raises yet a more difficult and enduring problem for the teacher to consider. It is, according to Hymes (Cazden, John, and Hymes, 1972),

> how to combine two (or multiple) sets of values, two (or multiple) speech communities, so as not to repress personal and community worth, yet give access to means made necessary by forces outside the local community's control. (p. liv) [parentheses added]

**A Final Note**

The beginning teacher, together with more experienced colleagues, is responsible for teaching all learners. This must be accomplished in an institution with a social history. Practices in that institution are socially organized and difficult for the beginner to see or change. Yet the novice teacher must become aware of the social organization of schools and classrooms in order to teach well. Teaching well is defined here as the engagement of pupils in learning activities that lead them to become independent thinkers and learners. It is also defined as teaching that acknowledges the differences in traditions, beliefs, and norms for communication that children bring to learning.

A central aspect of the beginning teacher's knowledge must be an awareness of the social organization of schools and classrooms. Teachers, according to Bernstein (1972) "need to examine the social assumptions underlying the organization, distribution, and evaluation of knowledge [because] the power relationships created outside the school penetrate the organization, distribution, and evaluation of knowledge through the social context of their transmission" (p. 150). Teachers can seize the opportunity to shape learning environments in which children may learn more effectively and equitably if they are aware of the social

organization of their practice and the norms of the school, community and society in which that practice is embedded. This awareness is an essential element of effective teaching.

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## APPENDIX: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following are important primary sources and review chapters for teacher educators interested in learning more about the social organization of schools and classrooms. They have been organized according to key issues raised in the paper and are briefly annotated.

### Understanding Cultural Settings

Spradley, James P., and David W. McCurdy (1972). *The cultural experience: Ethnography in complex society.* Chicago: SRA Associates.

This book is an excellent primer for teacher educators and beginning teachers alike. It introduces the reader to the concept of culture defined as knowledge of the social norms for appropriate behavior in a particular group and setting. The first half of the book provides an overview of this concept and of "ethnography," or the research techniques and texts used to study culture. The second half of the book consists of ethnographic studies edited by the primary authors but written by their undergraduate students. These brief and well written studies illustrate the normative knowledge operant in many practices and professions and in both formal and informal settings. In addition, several of the studies deal explicitly with children, classrooms, and schools.

### The Social Organization of Schooling

Sarason, Seymour B. (1971). *The culture of the school and the problem of change.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This classic book reports Sarason's attempts to understand school culture and its relationship to the larger society. The book draws in part on experiences in the Yale Psycho-Educational Clinic, which Sarason planned and directed. It emphasizes the difficulty of school change by taking the theoretical position that schools are culturally organized. School culture is seen as embedded in participants' knowledge, activities, and policies. The problem of educational change is analyzed in terms of this cultural view of schooling. The complex social roles of school participants and the centrality of the principal are stressed in describing the conditions for successful school change.

Goodlad, John I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

This recent and popular book makes several important contributions to our thinking about the social organization of schools and classrooms. Goodlad's research and historical review illuminate public expectations for schooling and raise questions about the fit between

our hopes for schooling and the social and academic realities of our schools and classrooms. The book closes in on classroom practice by reporting survey and observational research about how school time is spent, how the school curriculum is derived, and what is studied in school and by whom. In addition, Goodlad offers a critical composite portrait of the classroom learning environment and suggests ways in which it might be changed for the better.

### Classroom Social Organization, Curriculum, and Instruction

Barnes, Douglas (1976). *From communication to curriculum.* New York: Penguin Books.

According to Cazden's (1986) review of research on classroom discourse, the British have excelled in linking the study of the social organization of classroom communication to issues of curriculum and instruction. In this and earlier books, Douglas Barnes draws from extensive research on classroom discussion. Barnes locates many problems of school learning not in pupils' innate language difficulties but in the social conditions which constrain their school talk and, hence, their opportunity to learn academic content. The analyses in Barnes book demonstrate his thesis with examples of teacher/student communication particularly in group discussion settings.

### The Social Organization of Schooling and Problems of Equity

Trueba, Henry T., Grace Pung Guthrie, and Kathryn Hu-Pei Au (Eds.). (1981). *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House

This book is one of the most readable and comprehensive collections of research on the social organization of schools and classrooms as it relates to issues of multicultural and bilingual education. Based on more than a decade of ethnographic research, the book includes descriptions of theory and method, research findings, and practical implications. Of special note are chapters on the relationship between school and community, teacher collaboration in ethnographic research, and descriptions of minority culture among Hawaiians, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and Black Americans. As is the case in Spradley and McCurdy's book, these case studies make excellent reading for teacher educators and beginning teachers alike.

Philips, Susan U. (1983). *The invisible culture: Communication in classroom and community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation.* New York: Longman.

This is an exemplary monograph of a study of culture and communication at home and at school. The study is valuable not only for its insights into the lives and learning of Native American children in one community, but for the questions it raises about educational response to culture differences within the classroom. The study also introduces a key analytic concept, the "participant structure," which refers to the social organization of talk within instructional events such as lessons. The participant structure offers a way to think about lesson structure in terms of the rights and duties for participation which teachers and pupils assume. This construct allows teacher educators and their students to analyze lessons with new insight into the tacit norms they hold for participation and the ways those norms may enhance or impede opportunity to learn among children from varying cultural backgrounds.

**Reviews of Relevant Research**

Wittrock, Merlin C. (Ed.). (1986). *Handbook of research on teaching (3rd ed.).* New York: Macmillan.

Published each decade for the past thirty years, the *Handbook* offers state of the art reviews of research on significant problems and topics in educational research. Of particular relevance to the matter of the social organization of schools and classrooms are two chapters in the most recent edition: Frederick Erickson's chapter, "Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching," and Courtney B. Cazden's chapter on "Classroom Discourse." Erickson's chapter tackles issues of theory, research method, and educational policy and practice. It offers a detailed introduction to the field of qualitative or ethnographic research on teaching and stresses the role such interpretive work can play in illuminating local meanings and practice.

Cazden's chapter also focuses on descriptive research but is not limited explicitly to a review of ethnographic studies. What ties the studies in her review together is a concern for the language of teaching and learning. The chapter considers issues of theory and method and reports findings related to event or lesson structure, teacher talk, cultural difference and differential treatment, and the relation of types of classroom talk to pupils' opportunities to learn. Taken together, these two chapters help the reader to understand the social organization of schools and classrooms and the significance of the organization for classroom communication and, thus, for teaching and learning.